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ABSTRACT

On November 5, 1985, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) adopted a uniform set of high school subject requirements for admission to public university baccalaureate degree programs and to public community college associate in arts (AA) and associate in science (AS) degree programs. The specific high school subjects required for admission effective fall 1990 are 4 years of English, 3 years of social studies, 3 years of mathematics, 3 years of sciences, and 2 years of electives in foreign language, music, or art. This report discusses procedures for implementing these requirements in community colleges. After exploring the advantages of the admissions requirements, the problems yet to be addressed and resolved are identified. Next, the report examines issues related to the establishment of a formal program admissions process involving application for admission; assessment and review of records; counseling, advising, and orientation; and acceptance/non-acceptance. Then, the report points to the need for each college to identify competency-levels in English, math, science, and social science. The next sections look at decisions to be made regarding acceptable alternatives for admission, the establishment of a "conditional" or "provisional" admissions category, and the possible need to redefine remedial education and to re-evaluate the college's AA and AS degree general education requirements. Finally, the report identifies a number of unresolved issues that need to be addressed system- and state-wide. (LAL)

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PROCESSES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE NEW ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Illinois Community College Board
Springfield, Illinois

Agenda Item #14
December 6, 1985

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Illinois Community College Board

PROCESSES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE NEW ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

REPORT: On November 5, 1985, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) adopted a uniform set of high school subject requirements for admission to public university baccalaureate degree programs and to public community college Associate in Arts (AA) and Associate in Science (AS) degree programs, effective for students admitted in Fall 1990. The specific high school subjects required for admission are:

-- four years of English (emphasizing written and oral communications and literature),

-- three years of social studies (emphasizing history and government),

-- three years of mathematics (introductory through advanced algebra, geometry, trigonometry, or fundamentals of computer programming),

-- three years of the sciences (laboratory sciences), and

-- two years of electives in foreign language, music, or art.

There are two advantages in the IBHE-mandated Associate in Arts and Associate in Science degree admissions requirements: First, admissions requirements will be consistent for all public colleges and universities in the state. Community colleges will no longer have to attempt to meet a variety of requirements from diverse institutions, which usually has resulted in not being able to satisfy anyone. Second, the very consistency in the requirements should, indeed, present a clear signal to high school students, their parents and counselors, and the general public as to what is expected as minimum preparation for entry into baccalaureate programs. In the long run, the quality of high school preparation and the quality of both associate transfer degrees and baccalaureate degrees should also improve.

In the short term, however, there are numerous problems yet to be addressed and resolved. While the requirements themselves are no longer an issue, from a community college perspective at least, there is much to do between now and Fall 1990. Each community college will need to make a series of decisions in order to implement these new standards. In order for ICCB to submit a systemwide progress report to IBHE by July 1, each community college will need to submit a progress report on its plans for the implementation of these admissions requirements to ICCB by May 15.

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Establishment of a Formal Program Admissions Process

In implementing the new AA and AS admissions requirements (the IBHE resolution does not speak to AAS, AGE, AGS, or ALS programs), the first decision for community colleges to address is the need to establish a formalized program admissions process. There appear to be at least four steps or stages within such a formalized process: 1) the application for admission, 2) assessment, including testing as well as a review of records of prior educational achievement, 3) counseling, advising, and orientation for each applicant, and 4) acceptance/non-acceptance.

While community colleges have had a formalized process in the past for admission to such programs as nursing and radiologic technology, establishing such a process for AA and AS degree programs appears to some to be a radical departure, which it is not. The purpose behind admissions standards and processes is to provide prospective students the best counsel and advice on their chances of success in the program of choice. If a student has little or no chance of success, it is a disservice to the student (and to the faculty) to admit the student to that program. Instead the student should be counseled into a program, or a preparatory program, more suited to his/her abilities.

The chief stumbling block appears to be a misunderstanding of the "open door" concept. The phrase "open door" is not found in the Illinois Public Community College Act of 1965, which specifically addresses the need for admissions requirements or standards for each program the college offers. The Act requires that colleges "admit all students qualified to complete any one of their programs" and "counsel and distribute the students among programs according to their interests and abilities;" requires that students admitted to AA and AS degree programs have "ability and competence similar to that possessed by students admitted to state universities;" and stipulates that if enrollment is limited in a particular program, the college must select for admission those who are "best qualified."

The "open door" concept, when applied to the college as a whole, rather than to individual programs, conveys to the public that the college stands willing and able to provide further educational opportunities to all prospective students regardless of their prior educational attainment. Community colleges offer access and the opportunity to prepare for admission and to overcome deficiencies so that students can be admitted with the good chance of succeeding in their chosen curriculum. For this reason, all Illinois public community colleges offer a variety of programs, including remedial and adult basic and secondary education coursework, as well as tutoring and other assistance to help people to prepare and to succeed.

The chief benefit to establishing a formal program admissions process is the establishment up-front of assessment and counseling/advising. Community colleges have long prided themselves on "taking students where they are and getting them to where they want to be." Without appropriate assessment and counseling/advising at the outset, this has little chance of occurring. An appropriate assessment, counseling, and course placement process, however, can positively impact retention.

Identification of Subject Area Competencies

The second set of decisions that will need to be made by each college is perhaps less evident: The identification of the competencies each of these required subject areas was meant to promote. This appears to be a necessary step because of the diverse student body served by the community colleges. With an average age systemwide of 31, it is obvious that most students entering a community college do not come directly from high school and, thus, are not likely to have transcripts that show all of these specific courses. Even those students who do come directly from high school may not have followed a college-preparatory program. In addition, many community college students completed high school through equivalency exams such as the GED. Past experience also suggests that completion of four years of high school English, for example, does not necessarily guarantee that a student is able to read and write standard American English. In defining competencies in each subject area, advice should be sought from statewide disciplinary associations. In addition, for English and mathematics, the college's previous record of assessment for course placement should be able to serve as a guide.

By identifying appropriate competency levels in English, math, science, and social studies for entrance into the AA or AS degree curricula and, thus, into freshman-level coursework, the college will be able to establish alternative routes for the demonstration of these competencies--that is, alternatives to presenting a high school transcript with each of these subjects listed.

Specification of Acceptable Alternatives for Admission

The third set of decisions, then, is to lay out these possible alternative routes to admission. One alternative, already partially in place in most community colleges, is the adoption of standardized assessment tests. ETS, ACT, and other testing companies have a variety of testing instruments available, especially in the areas of reading, writing, and math. Preference in assessment is for standardized criterion-referenced tests, rather than for normative or "home-made" tests. "Home-made" tests may not be able to stand the pressure of public scrutiny as an initial screening device. Since students have "bad days," there needs to be a back-up assessment system to serve as an appeals process.

In addition to selecting a test battery, cut-off scores will need to be set. The setting of cut-off scores is not usually a strict "go/no go" decision. That is, while scores above a certain level may clearly indicate admission is warranted and scores below a certain level may clearly indicate non-admission, there is likely to be a middle range of scores about which professional judgment will need to be made.

Another alternative to both transcript evaluation and assessment testing might be the assessment of experiential learning, using the Council for the Assessment of Experiential Learning (CAEL) guidelines. This alternative might

be particularly applicable for older adults, and perhaps, more applicable to the social studies requirement than other areas. Yet another alternative might be the successful completion of remedial or preparatory courses at the community college.

Alternatives may not be the same for each subject area. For example, the college might require a particular test (and cut-off score) in English and math, even though the student presents the required number of units, while the college may test only those students who do not present the required number of units in science or social science. The four years between now and Fall 1990 provide time for colleges to pilot test one or more test batteries and, particularly, to test the appropriate cut-off scores for admission and for placement into college-level or remedial courses.

Establishment of a "Conditional" or "Provisional" Admissions Category

The fourth decision area is the establishment of a "conditional" (or provisional) admissions category and a monitoring process for students who are conditionally admitted. As suggested earlier, there will be a group of students who are clearly admissible and another group who are clearly not admissible because their records indicate their chance of success is 1 in 1000. There may, however, be a sizable group of students who are admissible on the condition that they make up a deficiency concurrently with their associate transfer degree coursework. The college will need to determine the maximum deficiency allowed for conditional admission and the amount of time allowed for making up the deficiency. Careful counseling is also needed for these students so that a deficiency is completed before the college-level course in the area is attempted. Some colleges may need to become more cognizant of the pre-requisites, both stated and unwritten, of their various transfer courses in order to counsel students appropriately.

Re-evaluation of Remedial Programs and General Education Requirements

The fifth and final decision area is the possible need to redefine remedial education and to re-evaluate the college's AA and AS degree general education requirements. The IBHE has indicated that one of the tasks of the recently constituted Committee on the Study of Undergraduate Education will be to study the policies governing remedial education statewide. In the meantime, depending upon the decisions made by an individual college in the four areas outlined above, each college will also need to re-examine its remedial program. The requirements suggest that courses may need to be developed to handle deficiencies in social studies and science, areas that have not previously been defined as remedial and which may more accurately be called "college-preparatory." It may be useful in designing any new courses, until (or unless) a decision is made to the contrary, to equate three "college" credit hours to a "unit" or full year's study in high school. Other questions also arise. If remediation is mandated for a conditionally admitted student, is it sufficient that the student pass the mandated course(s) OR does the

student also need to re-take the assessment test? General education requirements within the AA and AS degrees may also need to be examined in order to make sure that they expand upon and do not merely duplicate the competencies required for admission.

Unresolved Issues

Even with these clear standards for admission, there remain a number of unanswered questions that will need to be answered system- and statewide. First, the redefinition of what constitutes remedial education and who is responsible for providing it is already on the IBHE Committee's agenda.

Second, how will the funding of remedial education be accomplished? Can it be assumed, since the admissions standards are a state mandate, that the additional funds to mount larger remedial or preparatory programs will be forthcoming? Will Rules (and laws, if necessary) governing state and federal financial aid permit students to "count" more remedial or preparatory work? If not, what will happen to these students?

Finally, what will be the impact of these standards on occupational AAS degree and certificate students and upon ALS/AGE/AGS degree enrollments? Currently all three "types" of students may be taking the same English or history or psychology course. Are these standards suggesting that they should not be? What effects, if any, will there be on AAS degree capstone programs at public universities?

In conclusion, this report identified five major decision areas that each college will need to address in implementing the new AA and AS degree admissions requirements in Fall 1990. Although the standards themselves are uniform for all public colleges and universities, considerable flexibility remains to each college in implementing these standards. This report also identified three issues that have yet to be resolved and which are likely to require resolution at the state level.

It is expected that details and alternatives for implementing these admissions requirements will be the subject of various conferences, workshops, and meetings. The Transfer Coordinators group and various disciplinary associations intend to begin addressing implementation issues this spirng. As information is received by ICCB, it will be passed on to the colleges for consideration.

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